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VI.—PARADISE LOST 9. 506; NATIVITY HYMN 133-153.

The few who nowadays read the whole of *Paradise Lost* must have been struck with the lines in the Ninth Book which describe the splendor of the tempting serpent (495 ff.), and close, after the poet's wont, with a pendant cluster of mythological comparisons:

Never since of serpent kind
Lovelier, not those that in Illyria changed
Hermione and Cadmus, or the god
In Epidaurus.

But why Hermione? *Harmonia* was the name of Cadmus' wife.

The great Bentley scented corruption throughout the text of *Paradise Lost*. It was contaminated, he maintained, by a perverted amanuensis. 'The Ignorant,' he says, 'mistakes Hermione, the daughter of Menelaus and Helena, for Harmonia, the daughter of Mars and Venus, wife of Cadmus.' 'Slashing' Bentley is out-slashed by Keightley: 'Here is a strange mistake, and which proves how little the poet's memory was to be relied on. One would think that any schoolboy would know that the name of Cadmus's wife was Harmonia.' Other editors attempt no explanation, except Newton; he thinks Milton found 'Hermione and Cadmus' more musical than 'Harmonia and Cadmus'—which it is.

That Milton, even as a schoolboy, knew better than Keightley supposed is shown by a sentence in one of his Prolusions:¹ 'Hinc Harmoniam Jovis et Electrae fuisse filiam reverenda credidit antiquitas, quae cum Cadmo nuptui data esset,' etc.

In truth Milton had documentary precedent for *Hermione* instead of *Harmonia*. It is a frequent variant in mediæval manuscripts of certain texts, together with a variety of intermediate forms—*Harmonie*, *Hermonia*, *Harmiona*, *Hermiona*. The text in which Milton was most likely to observe this variant was Statius' *Thebaid*. The name *Harmonia* occurs nine times—at 2. 267, 272, 290; 3. 271; 4. 206; 7. 603; 8. 236; 9. 824;

¹ *De Sphaerarum Concentu*, Prose Works, ed. Symmons, 6. 154.

10. 893. In nine of the manuscripts, all of an inferior group, written at various dates from the tenth to the fifteenth century, the reading is *Hermione* (with inflectional differences). None of these manuscripts was collated before Lindenbrog's² edition of 1600, in which this variant is recorded, though not incorporated in the text.³ *Hermione* is, however, the reading in the Cruceus edition of Statius, Paris, 1618. Nor is this variant confined to the text, but occurs also in the commentary by Lactantius, on 1. 179, 288, 680; 2. 266, 272; 3. 269, 274, and is so reprinted in the edition in which Milton did his reading of Statius.⁴ The variant appears again in the *Narrationes* of Lactantius 3.16 (*Auctores Mythographi Latini*, ed. van Staveren, p. 297). But a far more significant instance is found in the scholia of the Pseudacron to Horace, *Ars Poetica* 187: 'Cadmus et Hermione in angues conversi sunt. Nam Hermione filia Martis et Veneris dicitur fuisse.' All the manuscripts which contain this scholium read *Hermione*,⁵ and Milton might have read it either in quotation or in paraphrase in at least eight editions of Horace prior to 1654.⁶ These instances are enough to indicate how well-known the variant probably was to one who read his classics as thoroughly and extensively as did Milton.

But how old was this variant, and how did it first occur? Critical apparatus sufficient for a final answer is wanting, but, of the instances cited, the scholium of the Pseudacron seems to be the oldest. All the manuscripts containing it clearly refer themselves to a common origin, not later than 450-500.⁷ An earlier date for the variant I have not found. As for the extant manuscripts of the texts here cited, *Hermione* occurs in every century from the tenth to the fifteenth.

Circumstances easily suggest themselves which may have led to a confusion of *Harmonia* with *Hermione*. Neither of the

² See Kohlmann's edition of the *Thebaid*, p. 39 and n.

³ Kohlmann, Preface. In his note on 2. 267, he seems to imply that Lindenbrog reads *Hermione*, but the copies in the Bodleian and the British Museum read *Harmonia*.

⁴ On other books in Milton's library see Pattison, *Life of Milton*, p. 17; *AJP*. XXII 344. His copy of Pindar is in the Harvard Library.

⁵ Pseudacron, ed. O. Keller, vol. II, p. 340.

⁶ These I have examined. How greatly this number might be increased a glance at the list in the British Museum catalogue will show.

⁷ Pseudacron, ed. Keller, vol. I, p. xlii; vol. II, p. viii.

personages in mythology so named was very distinct or important. The first assimilation of the name *Harmonia* to *Hermione* may have been felt in the not infrequent Greek spelling, *Harmonie*, or in the Latin spelling, *Hermiona*. More advanced intermediate stages are suggested by the variety of spellings given above. *Hermione*, furthermore, seems to have been frequently a name for women, especially in the Empire, and later amongst the Christians,⁸ and a familiar name often displaces a similar but less familiar one. Then, if the error first occurred in a scholium, it was less likely to be corrected than in poetry or literary prose. Once established, it seems to have persisted through the centuries of decline in scholarship, and to have withstood correction even during the Renaissance down to Milton's time.

An instance of it in Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum* shows how common the error was. He twice tells the story of Cadmus and Harmonia (2. 63; 9. 37), in the first instance using the name *Hermione*, and in the second, *Harmonia*. In both cases Boccaccio draws from the same sources—Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4. 562 ff.), and Jerome's version of the Second Book of the *Chronica* of Eusebius. But he could not have got the variant from Ovid, because in his account of Cadmus Ovid does not mention Harmonia; nor from Jerome, by any variants recorded in the best editions of that text. Evidently Boccaccio was familiar with both forms, and felt no scrupulous preference between them. It is not strange, then, if to Milton the variant *Hermione* was so well-known that he felt free to use it for the improvement of his cadence.

Bentley was seventy when he published his *Milton*. Even if his great powers were prematurely declining, it yet seems strange that he should have forgotten what he must previously have observed somewhat carefully on at least three occasions. He was the first to collate the Codex Roffensis of the *Thebaid*, which consistently reads *Hermiona*. He was also the first to collate a manuscript of this text at St. Peter's College, Cambridge, in which the same variant is found throughout.⁹ Furthermore his notes on the *Ars Poetica* in his edition of Horace

⁸ De-Vit, *Onomasticon*, s. v.

⁹ *Thebaid*, ed. Kohlmann, pp. x, xiv.

show what we should expect, a familiar use of the scholia of the Pseudacron.

The familiar lines in Milton's *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* describing the song of the angelic host close with these stanzas:

For, if such holy song
 Enwrap our fancy long,
 Time will run back and fetch the Age of Gold;
 And speckled Vanity
 Will sicken soon and die,
 And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould;
 And Hell itself will pass away,
 And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Yea, Truth and Justice then
 Will down return to men,
 Orbed in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
 Mercy will sit between,
 Throned in celestial sheen,
 With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;
 And Heaven, as at some festival,
 Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.

But wisest Fate says no,
 This must not yet be so;
 The Babe yet lies in smiling infancy
 That on the bitter cross
 Must redeem our loss.

Various sources of details in this passage from the Psalms, the *Iliad*, the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil, and Horace, have been noted by the editors.¹⁰ But the thought as a whole is that in the Fifth Book of the *Divine Institutes* of Lactantius. In chapter 5 he has recounted the legend of the Golden Age and Saturn's reign, the departure of Justice from the earth, and the ensuing cruelty of men beginning with the reign of Jupiter. This later régime is described as one of injustice, violence, and imposture, the opposites of Milton's Justice, Mercy, and Truth. These abuses, he says, shall continue as long as paganism endures. 'And now (in chapter 6) ¹¹ nothing remained of the pious and excellent condition of the preceding age; but Justice, being ban-

¹⁰ See Albert S. Cook, *Notes on Milton's Nativity Ode*, Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. XV, pp. 345, 6.

¹¹ Fletcher's translation, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. XXI.

ished, and drawing with her Truth, left to men error, ignorance, and blindness.' Then, in chapter 7; 'But God, as a most indulgent parent, when the last time approached, sent a messenger [Christ] to bring back that old age, and Justice, which had been put to flight, that the human race might not be agitated by very great and perpetual errors. Therefore the appearance of that golden time returned, and Justice was restored to the earth, but was assigned to a few; and this Justice is nothing else than the pious and religious worship of the one God.' But the Age of Gold has not been suffered wholly to return because 'virtue can neither be discerned, unless it has vices opposed to it; nor be perfect unless it is exercised by its adversity'¹². . . . This is evidently the cause which effects that, although Justice is sent to men, yet it cannot be said that a Golden Age exists; because God has not taken away evil, that He might retain that diversity which alone preserves the mystery of a divine religion.' Again, in chapter 8; 'Lay aside every evil thought from your hearts, and that Golden Age will at once return to you, which you cannot attain by any other means than by beginning to worship the true God. But you [pagans] long for Justice on the earth, while the worship of false gods continues, which cannot possibly come to pass. . . . How happy and how golden would be the condition of human affairs, if throughout the world gentleness, and piety, and peace, and innocence, and equity, and temperance, and faith, took up their abode!' The rest of the Fifth Book arraigns the injustice, falsity, and cruelty of paganism, to which the coming of Christ will, in time, put an end. The burden of Milton's hymn is the triumph of the new-born Savior over the pagan deities.

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¹² Lat. *adversis*. Better, 'its opposites'?